

RESPONSE RESEARCH STUDY
of
TEENAGE CIGARETTE SMOKING AND PURCHASING
BEHAVIOR

The 1980's have witnessed a substantial change in the American Public's attitude toward smoking cigarettes. Along with this attitude switch have come new laws regulating smoking. This has had an impact on the companies and organizations which are associated with the selling of cigarettes. N A M A, which is the national trade association of the merchandise vending machine industry, is one such organization which has been affected by this attitude change. It is specifically concerned about proposals to ban the sale of cigarettes through vending machines. The rationale for such a ban is the allegation that many teenagers purchase cigarettes from vending machines. As a result, N A M A commissioned Response Research, an outside, independent marketing firm located at 500 North Michigan Avenue in Chicago, Illinois 60611, to conduct a survey to determine how and where teenagers ages 13 through 17 who smoke currently obtain cigarettes. The study also makes findings about what influences teenagers to begin smoking.

It is hoped that the findings presented here will assist interested organizations and lawmakers in getting factual and current data regarding the involvement of vending machines in the smoking habits of teenagers.

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FINDINGS

STUDY OF TEENAGE CIGARETTE SMOKING AND PURCHASING BEHAVIOR

June/July 1989

Introduction

This study was conducted to determine how and where teenagers who smoke currently obtain their cigarettes. More specifically, this study was done to measure the following:

- the extent to which teenagers obtain cigarettes by purchasing them, and
- the portion of the cigarette purchasing that is done through vending machines.

Methodology

This was a mall intercept study which surveyed 1015 males and females between the ages of 13 and 17 who smoke cigarettes. The number of teens interviewed from each age group mirrored the 1987 Census Data of the teenage population. Additionally, half of the interviews were conducted with females and half were conducted with males.

In order to obtain a geographically dispersed sample of teens, the study was conducted in twenty cities throughout the U.S. Two different mall locations were used in each city. One mall was located in an average to above average income area and the other was in an average to below average area. This was done to get the best possible representation of different socioeconomic areas.

Overall Findings

This study found that vending machines are not a primary source of cigarettes for teenagers. When teens first start smoking, they rely heavily on their friends for cigarettes. After this initial phase, the main source of cigarettes for teens is an over-the-counter location.

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Detailed Findings

Initial Smoking Behavior

- On average, the teens included in this study started smoking at the age of thirteen. There was not a lot of difference between the males and females as to when they started smoking.
- The teens were asked to express in their own words the reasons why they started smoking. They indicated that the primary motivator was knowing someone else who smoked (58%). This other person was usually a friend (42%). Social pressure also played a role in the teens' trial of cigarettes (30%).
- Friends who smoked were both the main reasons why others started and the main source of cigarettes for these new initiates. Almost three in five of the teens (57%) said that their main source of cigarettes when they first started smoking was their friends. Unlike the others, the teens who started smoking before they were ten years old were equally likely to rely on their friends and on family members for cigarettes.
- Most of the teens who primarily got their cigarettes by purchasing them when they first started smoking bought them over-the-counter (84%) and not from a vending machine (only 16%).

Current Cigarette Consumption

- The teens were asked about their daily and weekly cigarette consumption. On average, these teens smoked half a pack of cigarettes the day before the interview. Additionally, the average male smoked more (11 cigarettes) than the average female (9 cigarettes).
- As can be expected, the younger teens smoked less than the older teens. In fact, the 17 year olds smoked twice as many cigarettes as the 13 year olds (14 cigarettes vs. 7 cigarettes on average).
- The number of cigarettes that the teens reported smoking in the week before the interview was slightly less than seven times their reported daily consumption. On average, the males smoked just over 3 and a half packs (73 cigarettes) and the females had smoked just over two and a half packs (56 cigarettes); while the youngest teens smoked about half as much as the oldest teens (13 year olds--45 cigarettes and 17 year olds--88 cigarettes).

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Current Source Of Cigarettes

- While friends were initially the primary source of cigarettes, this is not the case beyond the first phase of smoking. The most frequently used source of cigarettes is to purchase them. Nearly three-quarters of the teens (72%) reported that they bought cigarettes more often than they used other methods of obtaining cigarettes. Furthermore, there was little variation on this measure between males and females. However, the older teens were more likely than the younger ones to buy cigarettes frequently (60% of 13 year olds vs. 85% of 17 year olds). And, very few of the 17 year olds (5%) never buy cigarettes.
- While friends are not the primary source of cigarettes once teens have established their smoking habit, they are an important secondary source. Almost half of the teens (45%) rely on friends occasionally for cigarettes. Friends are of particular importance to the younger teens. Almost four out of five 13 year olds (79%) go to their friends often or occasionally for cigarettes.
- Family members are not a significant source of cigarettes for teens regardless of their age.

Cigarette Purchasing Behavior

- Frequent Purchasers, those who buy cigarettes often or occasionally, rely much more on over-the-counter sources than on vending machines. Almost two-thirds of the Frequent Purchasers (64%) buy over-the-counter often whereas only one in eleven (9%) buys from a vending machine often.
- Over-the-counter sources are used more by the older teens than by the younger teens. Over three-quarters of the 17 year olds (78%) buy over-the-counter frequently whereas only half (46%) of the 13 year olds do.
- Those who purchase over-the-counter often or occasionally cited four locations as the ones they go to most frequently: convenience stores (43%), gas stations (29%), grocery stores (11%) and drug stores (6%).
- As mentioned, less than one in eleven Frequent Purchaser uses a vending machine often. In fact, over three-quarters of the Frequent Purchasers (78%) seldom or never buy from a vending machine. Of course, this varies by age. The 13 year olds are the most likely to use vending machines (22% do so often) and the 17 year olds are the least likely (2% do so often).
- The primary location of the vending machines used by teens is a restaurant or other eating establishment. Almost half (47%) of those who buy from a

vending machine often or occasionally go to a restaurant most often. Bowling alleys (11%) and gas stations (11%) are also popular locations.

- Those who use over-the-counter locations often or occasionally gave their reasons for this usage. There were three main reasons:
 - they are convenient (31%),
 - they will sell them to the teens (18%), and
 - they prefer these locations because they dislike vending machines.
- Those who seldom or never bought over-the-counter did not buy from this source more frequently primarily because they were underage and felt they would be asked for an ID or hassled in some other way (59%).
- Teens who bought from vending machines often or occasionally found this source to be attractive because no one will stop them from buying cigarettes this way (56%).
- The teens who seldom or never bought from vending machines did not buy there because they felt that these machines were not conveniently located (48%) and cigarettes in machines were more expensive than those sold in stores (35%).

Difficulties Encountered When Trying To Buy Cigarettes

- The teens who buy cigarettes (often, occasionally or seldom) were asked if they had ever been prevented from buying cigarettes. Three in five of them had, with more 13 year olds having been refused (71%) than 17 year olds (50%).
- Those who had been refused were asked if they had been refused when buying over-the-counter and/or from a vending machine. Virtually all of these teens (98%) had been refused when buying over-the-counter, while about one in nine (11%) had been prevented from buying from a vending machine for a reason other than that the vending machine was broken.

Teen Awareness Of Cigarette Purchasing Laws

- Three-quarters of the teens (76%) were aware of a state law which prohibited certain kinds of people from buying cigarettes. When asked what the law said almost everyone (95%) indicated that it required the residents to be a certain age in order to buy cigarettes.

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Parental Awareness and Approval Of Their Teenager's Smoking

- The teens were asked who else in their family smoked. Only 15% said that no one else did. Almost half of the teens had a father and/or mother who smoked (49% and 45%, respectively).
- As a way of determining whether or not their parents were aware of their smoking and approved of it, the teens were asked if they were permitted to smoke at home. Almost two in five teens (38%) were allowed to. The portion of teens who could smoke at home varied by age. Less than a quarter of the 13 year olds (22%) were able to while over half of the 17 year olds (54%) could.
- Additionally, almost half (45%) of the teens were permitted by their parents to purchase cigarettes. This too, varied by the age of the teen. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the 17 year olds were permitted to while only a quarter of the youngest teens could.
- When asked where they got the money for their cigarettes, three main sources came up: a job (63%), from parents/mom/dad (26%), and from one's allowance (26%). Since the older teens are the most likely to hold jobs, this was their primary source of cigarette money, whereas the younger teens relied more on their allowance and their parents.

The complete study including the questionnaire and methodology used and a description of the pretest is available upon request at a price of \$20 from the National Automatic Merchandising Association, 20 North Wacker Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60606.

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